

MEMORANDUM

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June 23, 1961

TO : The Honorable  
John F. Kennedy  
President of the United States of America

FROM : Senator Mike Mansfield

SUBJECT: Berlin.

I. Factors to bear in mind, relative to possible use of military force at Berlin.

1. Military force should be the last resort, not the first, in the assertion of our rights and responsibilities respecting Berlin.
2. The use of military force should be limited to that which is necessary for the assertion of these rights and responsibilities.
3. Any military force which must be used should be supplied by all nations having comparable rights and responsibilities in West Berlin or significant interest in its fate. (i.e. U.S., France, Britain, West Germany, N.A.T.O.)
4. As much of the rest of the world as possible must be persuaded to the rightness of our course, at least to the point of assuring benevolent neutrality (key countries: Brazil, India, Japan).
5. The preponderance of our own people must understand the necessity for the use of force in Berlin and, equally important, the limitations on its use if there is to be any chance to avoid a massive catastrophe.

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II. Suggestions for the application of these principles.

1. To establish our present rights and responsibilities, it will be sufficient simply to propose taking the matter to the International Court.

That we are unqualifiedly willing to do so should be hammered home all over the world. Our positive willingness rather than the Soviet unwillingness, if it is unwilling to face a court test, should be the theme and tone of this effort.

2. The possibilities of the U.N. General Assembly in making this point should not be overlooked.
3. We should not stop at the point of establishing our rights and responsibilities respecting Berlin. We should make it clear that we are opposed only to unilateral Soviet change of that situation, not to mutually agreeable changes which would take that situation out of the cold war. We must pursue this point with the same vigor that we employ in insisting upon our rights as against unilateral Soviet efforts to abrogate them.
4. In connection with the above, it should be recalled that Khrushchev did not have a completely closed mind on the Western proposals at Geneva in 1959. There is no certainty as to what might have happened to those proposals had it not been for the ill-fated Paris meeting after the ill-fated U-2 incident.

Thompson, Bohlen or comparable diplomats might explore in private the possibilities of resumption of consideration of these proposals, along with Soviet proposals, beginning from the point where discussions were abruptly broken off in 1960.

If these discussions show any promise, further talks at the Foreign Minister's level, with perhaps the British and French joining might be in order--still in private.

Quiet diplomacy is the main point: Despite criticism from the opposition press which will be heavy, all these preliminary talks must be in confidence if they are going to have any chance of producing results. It will be results, which in the end will provide the answer to the criticism and, in any event, unless we do produce results, criticism of methods will be the least of the difficulties.

If the above measures are pursued with earnest intent and without blatant propaganda efforts, it is barely possible that they may lead to a settlement. Even if they do not, they should serve to strengthen us at home and abroad for what must come next. To prepare the nation for the next step, if it must come, we need to move simultaneously somewhat along these lines:

1. Follow Senator Cooper's suggestion to bring in the best heads on Germany but do it through open hearings by the Foreign Relations Committee and broaden Cooper's selection to include some younger people. I do not believe you, as President, should get directly involved with the panel, as Cooper suggested, other than to give a general blessing to Foreign Relations Committee hearings. Nor should present government officials--the men who must advise on the actual decisions be brought in even in Executive sessions. The dangers of leaks or slips are too great and we cannot afford at this time to give any official policy leads to the adversary except as the President directs.

2. We should begin at once in concert with the British and French to formulate a plan for the controlled use of military force, if necessary, in the assertion of our rights and responsibilities. The other N.A.T.O. nations should be sounded out on this. Particular consideration should be given to the possible use of West German forces.
3. We should re-screen all ranking U.S. military officers at home and abroad, connected with possible Berlin operations, to make certain that the men who will give the significant commands are persons with/highest sense of professional responsibility, completely disciplined, not given to politics or public relations, and fully cognizant of the significance of subordinating, without question, military action to the dimensions of the diplomatic decisions of the President and the Secretary of State.
4. We should begin now to tighten the direction of the Defense Department over the actions of the field commanders in Berlin and on its approaches and, in turn, to develop the closest liaison between that Department and the Department of State on this situation under the close and direct control of the Secretaries of both Departments.
5. You might consider specifically designating the Secretary of State as the only channel through which you will communicate your decisions on all aspects of this problem.

Finally, we ought to get clear in our own minds and our people ought to get clear that we are not in Berlin to prove anything about our strength or to show up the Russians. We are there because of responsibilities growing out of the war. We are there in a dangerous situation and will stay there until that situation can

be recast in a more peaceful pattern, which will still guarantee the safety of the people of West Berlin and also the preservation of the free concept in the former German capital.